

VAValuing Diversity

Department of
Veterans Affairs

A quarterly newsletter from the Under Secretary for Health Diversity Advisory Board (DAB)

Fall 2006

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Introducing the Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Advisory Board's Newsletter, *VAValuing Diversity*



Michael J. Kussman, MD, MS, MACP
Acting Under Secretary for Health

To my fellow Veterans Health
Administration (VHA) employees:

It is a great pleasure to help inaugurate the *VAValuing Diversity* Newsletter. I salute the Diversity Advisory Board for raising awareness about diversity at VHA, and creating new traditions, such as this Newsletter, to promote cultural awareness among our employees. And I commend all the employees who are taking a role in strengthening diversity at VHA by reading, learning from, and contributing to this new newsletter. VHA's diversity is essential to our success. We will accomplish our mission to provide safe, effective, efficient and compassionate health care for America's veterans only by making the best use of the talents, experiences, and insights of every single person in our workforce. We are a multicultural

organization serving men and women of many races, ethnicities and backgrounds.

If we do not value the diversity of our workforce, we will not be able to properly serve the diverse spectrum of veterans we are called upon to care for. But valuing diversity in all its many facets will enable us to draw upon and learn from the rich spectrum of cultures that make up our great nation. Your commitment to diversity will enable us to create a culture that makes the most of the tremendous potential in our workforce. This newsletter is one of the tools we will use to affirm and enhance that commitment.

Thank you for all you do to help us build and maintain VA as a model of cultivating diversity throughout the federal government.

“Our Strength is Our Diversity!”

DAB Membership

Co-Chairperson: Joy W. Hunter,
VHA Chief Learning Officer, Dean of VALU.

Co-Chairperson: Linda F. Watson,
Director, VISN 7.

Asian-Pacific Islander-American Committee: Vincent Ng, Medical Center Director, Providence VAMC.

Black/African American Committee: Guy B. Richardson,
Medical Center Director, Dayton VAMC.

Hispanic American Committee: Gabriel Perez,
Medical Center Director, Saginaw VAMC.

Native American Committee: Dr. David Lee, Chief of Staff, Boise VAMC.

Employment and Advancement of Women: Deborah A. Thompson, Director,
Northern Arizona Health Care System.

Employee with DisAbilities Committee: Larry Sandler, Director, VA Northern California Health Care System.

Financial Management and Evaluation Committee: Rita L. Reese, EEO Manager,
Office of Management Support,
VA Central Office.

Special Initiatives Committee: Rosalyn Cole, Associate Director of
Administration, Fargo VAMC & ROC.

Data Outcomes and Public Affairs Committee: Francine Fraser,
Health System Specialist, VISN 3.

Performance Measure Workgroup: Michelle Blakely, Associate Director,
Jesse Brown VAMC.

Center for Minority Veterans Representative: Lucretia M. McClenney, VA Central Office.

VA National Chaplain Service Office Representative: Chaplain Michael McCoy.

Executive Assistant: David D. Rabb, Office of Management Support, VA Central Office (virtual),
Minneapolis VA Medical Center.

Program Support: Sharon Ridley, Employees Education Service, VA Central Office.

Program Support: Tracy Dudley, Employees Education Service, VA Central Office.

“Don't believe a small group of committed individuals can not change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Recent Accomplishments and Current Activities

- Refined and strengthen the DAB Committee structure to support special emphasis leadership, targeted groups outreach and communication, agency wide networking opportunities and operational priority focus areas.
- Partnered with Patient Care Services to assess, refine and develop clinical cultural competence initiatives.
- Increased linkages with American Hospital Association Institute for Diversity.
- Expanded the DAB Website to include REACH for Diversity Toolkit.
- Hosted the Diversity Quality & Innovations Forum, VHA Revitalize Diversity; Essential for Success, Accelerator for Excellence (Co-sponsored with the Employee Education System and VHA National Leadership Board sponsored three keynote speakers and table topic session on ways to take advantage of diversity in VHA).
- Coordinated and expanded 2005 Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Awards Program.
- Put forth enhancements and expansion to diversity measures(s) that were included in Network Director and VACO Program Officials' 2006 Performance Contracts.
- Supported a coordinated approach to rolling out the Civility Respect Engagement in the Workplace (CREW) and Affirming the Commitment Initiatives to enhance VHA's culture climate.
- Piloted COLLAGE Web site through the DAB Black/African American Committee.
- Initiated through the DAB Black/African American Committee a mentoring development program.
- Collaborated with the National Center for Organizational Development on developing surveys targeted to women executives.
- Created and distributed the REACH for Diversity Campaign Video (Education).
- Sponsored a diversity-keynote speaker and diversity special interest topic networking sessions at the 2006 VHA Senior Management Conference.
- Participated in a panel discussion regarding career recruitment and retention strategies at the American Hospital Association National Leadership and Education Conference on Diversity, “Preparing for the Workforce of the Future.”
- Presented diversity awareness presentation and exhibit at the 2006 Leadership VA Alumni Association Annual Conference.
- Presented a diversity awareness presentation for the 2006 Health System Management Trainees.
- Coordinated efforts for the VA to establish formal organization affiliations and chapters with the Federal Asian Pacific American Council and the National Association of Health Service Executives.
- Provided diversity consultation and presentations at VA Medical Centers and VISNs.

“The great organizations celebrate the differences. They seek harmony, not uniformity. They hire talent, not color. They strive for oneness, not sameness.”

Gil Atinkson

“Our Strength is Our Diversity!”

Our Vision:

- To be a committed proactive champion for workforce diversity
- To create and support initiatives that bring about an inclusive, productive work environment now and in the future

Our Mission:

- To be a catalyst to enhance awareness, understanding, professional development, and management of diversity as an essential part of business success

Our Goals:

- To increase awareness of and sensitivity to diversity in the workforce
- To serve as a resource to VHA leaders in promotion of workforce diversity
- To identify challenges to the advancement of diversity within the VHA and develop programs or initiatives to address them
- To change paradigms and establish relationships with internal and community organizations/programs to enhance diversity in the VHA

Introducing *VALuing Diversity* Newsletter

This is the first of *VALuing Diversity*, the Diversity Advisory Board's quarterly Web-based newsletter. In it, we seek to heighten the awareness of what diversity is, how it affects our lives, and how it can work for all of us in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). It contains information, resources, and contacts useful to VHA employees.

According to VHA Directive 2000-021, the Advisory Board Charter, “Diversity equals those human qualities that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet presenting other individuals and groups. Diversity includes everyone; it is not something that is defined by race or gender. It extends to age, personal and corporate background, education, function, and personality. It also includes lifestyle, sexual and/or affectional orientation, geographic origin, physical abilities and/or qualities, tenure with the organization, exempt or nonexempt status, and management or non-management status.”

Diversity is inclusive; it is about everything and everybody. We hope that this newsletter is informative and thought provoking.

As we move forward, we need your help in coming up with timely articles that reflect the challenges and good work we face in optimizing diversity in VHA. If you would like to be a contributing writer, or have any suggestions for future articles and/or any diversity best practices at your facility that you would like to see featured in *VALuing Diversity* Newsletter, please contact one of us:

francine.fraser@va.gov

ruth.holmes@va.gov

david.rabb@va.gov

Show Me the Map: Increasing Diversity Awareness

Question: What's does a map have to do with diversity? **Answer:** A great deal in VA.



Thanks in part to the leadership of Joy Hunter and Linda Watson (co-chairs of DAB), the Veterans Health Administration, the National Cemetery Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity have teamed up with the VALearning University and Root Learning, Inc., to create a Diversity Learning Map.

To support the VA goal to be an employer of choice and provide veterans with high quality services, it is critical that all employees have a common understanding of the role of diversity in the workplace and its impact on our bottom line in caring for veterans and their families. The VA Diversity Learning Map is a visual, fun, and thought-provoking tool that:

- Explores the business case for diversity.
- Discusses the key facts and trends that tell the diversity story within VA.
- Explores VA initiatives and activities that will help get us to our future state.
- Discusses how we can utilize diversity to overcome the diverse challenges that we face.
- Examines situations and scenarios that bring diversity to life.
- Identifies the role that each individual in the organization plays in making the most of our differences.

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“A healthy, vital society is not one in which we all agree. It is one in which those who disagree can do so with honor and respect for other people’s opinion, and an appreciation of our shared humanity.”

Marianne Williamson

“Our Strength is Our Diversity!”

Using learning maps to make employees more aware of what is important to VA is not new. Root Leaning, Inc., has designed several learning maps for the VA in the past (e.g., Becoming One VA, Benefits, Changing Healthcare Environment, Compliance, Baldrige, Economics of Providing Care, Quality).

In July, at the Baltimore VAMC and the Minneapolis VAMC, focus groups were set up to experience the Diversity Learning Map and to provide recommendations and suggestions to improve the design. Representatives from NCA and VBA were also part of the focus groups, to ensure that the Learning Map captured the importance of diversity across the VA administrations. The final version of the Diversity Learning Map will be unveiled at the VHA Senior Management Conference in Las Vegas at the end of August and will be rolled out to the field shortly after.

The Diversity Learning Map supports VA's strategic goal of promoting diversity excellence and satisfaction in the workforce and foster a culture which encourages innovation.

Quality Innovation (Q&I) Forum: VHA Revitalizes Diversity: Essential for Success, Accelerator for Excellence

On Wednesday, January 18, 2006, the Diversity Q&I Forum was held in Arlington VA. This program, co-sponsored by the Employee Education System, the VHA National Leadership Board Communication Committee, and the Diversity Advisory Board, featured three dynamic diversity speakers:

- Ms. Jacquelyn Gaines (Providence Milwaukee Hospital, OR), “The Challenge for Minority Women in Healthcare”
- Mr. Luke Visconti (DiversityInc, NJ) “Benchmark Practices in Diversity Management”
- Dr. Sonja Boone (Northwestern Memorial Hospital, IL)

“Characteristics and Strategies of Culturally Competent Organizations”

To reinforce how diversity plays a significant role in VA, diversity poster sessions aligned to VHA strategies (Eight for Excellence) were presented. The poster presentations (jointly developed by various VHA leaders and several Executive Career Field Candidate Program participants) covered the following topics:

- Clinical Cultural Competency
- Health Care Disparities
- Culturally Competent Organization
- Workforce Diversity Now
- Business Case for Diversity
- Diversity Best Practices / Benchmarking
- Internship Programs, SEP/Employee of the Future

Another highlight of the program was the roundtable discussion session in which VHA leaders participated. The purpose of the roundtable discussion was to reflect on information shared at the Diversity Q&I Forum, and ascertain ideas and feedback on how VHA can improve diversity within our system. The questions presented during the roundtable discussion generated a plethora of ideas and suggestions on ways to advance diversity in VHA. Feedback from the Diversity Q&I Forum will be used to support the Diversity Advisory Board in developing recommendations and plans to enhance diversity efforts in VHA.

Copies of Ms. Gaines' presentation (on DVD) and Mr. Visconti's presentation (on audio CD) are available through the Employee Education System.

Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Awards Program Winners Announced

In addition to hearing thought provoking diversity presentations at this year's Diversity Q&I Forum, the 2005 Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Awards

Tenet of Managing Diversity:

Managing diversity is a long-term culture change process that to be effective must occur simultaneously at the individual, group, and organizational level. The involvement and commitment of managers and associates is crucial for success.

Source:
VHA Diversity Resource Guide, Strategies for Business Planning (Revised). O'Mara and Associates

Program winners were announced and honored. The Diversity Awards were presented to the recipients jointly by Dr. Michael J. Kussman, MD, Acting Under Secretary for Health, Joy W. Hunter, co-chair, Diversity Advisory Board, and Guy Richardson, Chair, Diversity Advisory Board African-American Committee.

The Diversity Awards Program, coordinated by the Diversity Advisory Board, is designed to recognize innovations, achievements, and success of diversity management programs and initiatives implemented in VHA program offices, VISNs, and medical centers across the nation.

Recognizing that many facilities in VHA are continuing to develop and refine their approaches to diversity management, the Diversity Advisory Board added four additional awards to recognize programs demonstrating development and achievement in the following areas:

1. Workforce Development and Succession Planning
2. Leadership Initiatives and Governance Practices
3. Business Practices
4. Cultural Competency

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“Our Strength is Our Diversity!”

The winners were:

First Place – Level 1 winner

Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital in Bedford, Massachusetts (Developed a number of programs to increase diversity among staff and enhance the cultural climate for staff and veterans.)

Honorable Mention – Level 1

VA Midwest Healthcare Network – VISN 23 based in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Level 2A (Workforce Development and Succession Planning)

VA Central California Health Care System in Fresno, California.

Level 2B (Leadership Initiative and Governance Practices)

VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinic in White City, Oregon.

Level 2C (Business Practices)

VISN 7 Southeast Network Contracting and Purchasing activities in Duluth, Georgia.

Level 2D (Cultural Competency)

United States Army Southeast Regional Medical Command and the VA Southeast Network Active Duty Rehabilitation Unit at the Augusta, Georgia, VA Medical Center.

During the awards ceremony, Dr. Kussman informed the audience “Leaders from across all sectors of American enterprise are realizing today that a focus on diversity management is critical to the success of the enterprise. Diversity management, at its most effective, is not defined, or deployed, as a specific initiative or a special program. Instead, respecting and capitalizing on the strengths found in diversity must become a corporate philosophy woven into the very fabric of the organization.” The winners of the USH Diversity Awards Program are doing just that.

For more information regarding the noteworthy accomplishments of the 2005 USH Diversity Awards Program

winners, please visit the Diversity Advisory Board Web site: <http://www.va.gov/diversity> (Intranet) or contact the winning facility directly.

The applications for the 2006 Under Secretary for Health's Diversity

Awards Program will be announced in October. For more information, contact Rosalyn L. Cole, Chair, Diversity Advisory Board Special Initiatives Committee, rosalyn.cole@va.gov

LVA Class of 2006 — Actions speak louder than words!



The Leadership VA (LVA) Class of 2006 proudly reflects the rich and wide diversity within VA.

As seen in the photo above, diversity is reflected in age, race, gender, and physical ability. What is not so apparent in the photo is the vast diversity that comes with occupations, work experience, education, talent, veteran status, personalities, work-styles, geographic locations, and other differences.

Michael Brenny, LVA Executive Director, is quick to point out that diversity in the LVA Class of 2006 is also seen among the participants from each of VA's three administrations: Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and National Cemetery Administration.

“We have participants that represent all parts of the Department. One of our major goals in LVA is to have inclusive representation of VA's entire workforce.”

Founded in 1978, the Leadership VA program is designed to contribute to the building of leaders within the Department of Veterans Affairs. During their LVA year, participants will:

- Become more familiar with important issues facing VA.
- Think, discuss, and learn about leadership and management.
- Network with leaders and peers across departments and programs within VA.

By taking advantage of what diversity has to offer, Mr. Brenny believes that VA becomes a more agile, competitive, and collaborative organization. “The opportunities for shared experience within each LVA class carry over and link the current class with the graduates of all previous LVA classes. The end result is a stronger and more cohesive VA.”

VHA Partnership with American Hospital Association’s Institute for Diversity in Health Management: Summer Enrichment Program (SEP)

“This was a win-win situation for both the interns and our facility. The student learned so much and we gained so much from her projects. We are looking forward to participating next year.”

These comments by Diana Carranza, associate director, VA Illiana Health Care System, captures the goals and benefits of the Institute for Diversity Summer Enrichment Program sponsored by the American Hospital Association and championed by the Diversity Advisory Board in VHA.

The goal of the Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) is to increase diversity in health care management by offering minority students full-time work experience during the summer in some of the nation’s top health care facilities. This is the fifth consecutive year that the Diversity Advisory Board has championed this program by sponsoring college and graduate school minority students interested in pursuing health care careers with VA Medical Centers operations. To provide the SEP

intern with the best quality education experience, each student is assigned an experienced and skilled preceptor for 12 weeks.

To date, the Diversity Advisory Board has sponsored 22 students, some of whom have gone on to become employed with VHA. Rosalyn Cole, chair of the Diversity Advisory Board Special Initiatives Committee, believes the SEP is a great opportunity to expose minority students with an interest in health services administration to the mission of VA. “The Summer Enrichment Program allows us to expand leadership opportunities for minority students while providing them with unique challenges and rewards of providing quality health care to our nation’s veterans. This is the Diversity Advisory Board’s contribution to early succession planning initiatives. “

The SEP runs from June until the end of August. This year, there were nine SEP interns sponsored by the Diversity Advisory Board:

Student and School	Sponsor and Organization
Noelle Diaz Stony Brook University Stony Brook, NY	Mary-Ellen Piche, FACHE Albany VAMC Albany, NY
Victoria Njoku Stanford University Palo Alto, CA	Joanne K. Joki VA Palo Alto Health Care System Palo Alto, CA
Adebola Omole Texas Woman’s University Houston, TX	Diana Carranza VA Illiana Health Care System Danville, IL
Brandon Batiste Emory University Rollins School of Public Health Atlanta, GA	Robin L. Hindsman VA Southeast Network Duluth, GA
Frasilie Stinvil Hofstra University Hempstead, NY	Joanne K. Joki VA Palo Alto Health Care System Palo Alto, CA
Keron Twum Oregon State University Corvallis, OR	Steven L. Lieberman, M.D., CHE VA Boston Healthcare System West Roxbury, MA
Willie Payton, Jr. Xavier University Cincinnati, OH	Guy Richardson, CHE VA Medical Center Dayton, OH
Julia Ransom University of Missouri-Columbia Columbia, MO	Cathi Spivey-Paul, FACHE VA Northern Indiana Health Care System Marion, IN
Sheree Morrison Hofstra University Hempstead, NY	Vincent Ng Providence VAMC Providence, RI

Department of Veterans Affairs Special Observances For 2006

January 16
Dr. Martin Luther King’s Birthday

February
Black History Month

March
Women’s History Month

May
Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month

August 26
Women’s Equality Day

September 15–October 15
Hispanic Heritage Month

September 17–23
Historically Black Colleges/Universities Week

October
National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month

November
Native American Indian Heritage Month

Our Strength is Our Diversity!

Piloting COLLAGE

The Diversity Advisory Board (DAB) has embarked on a new way of communicating with minority employees and special emphasis groups throughout VHA. COLLAGE, an interactive Web-based tool, facilitates communication between pre-established communities on the Intranet by allowing users to access workgroup files, discussion boards, and e-mail.

The DAB Black/African American Committee was asked in January to pilot COLLAGE for six months, in order to determine if it is an effective tool to coordinate, conduct and deploy information to participants in different locations throughout VHA across the country and should be expanded to other DAB special emphasis groups. During the pilot, the Black/African American Committee's Cultural Competency Subcommittee and the Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee used COLLAGE with great success. For example, the Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee used COLLAGE to solicit and manage applications from mentor and mentee candidates for the Black/African American Committee Development Program.

At the June 2006 DAB Face-to-Face Meeting, Guy Richardson, chairperson, Black/African American Committee, gave a final report to the DAB regarding COLLAGE and recommended that the pilot be extended to a recurring program and expanded to include two additional DAB special emphasis groups in fiscal year 2007.

The Diversity Advisory Board's COLLAGE site is one of 15 sponsored by the Employee Education System. As of July 10, 2006, 369 employees had registered on the Diversity Advisory Board's COLLAGE Web site.



REACH for Diversity Campaign

Under Secretary for Health Diversity Advisory Board's REACH for Diversity campaign addresses the diversity education and training needs within VHA. The purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness and understanding that diversity drives organizational growth and fuels human potential. The key principles supporting this campaign influence not only how VHA employees serve veterans and their families, but also provide a platform to address how VA employees should relate to one another in the workplace.

The principles supporting the campaign are simple. Over the span of five years, the Diversity Advisory Board will highlight one element of the campaign that is captured in the acronym **REACH**.

Respect: Embracing diversity starts and ends with respect for differences.

Education: Changing hearts and minds is an ongoing educational process.

Awareness: Understanding the value of diversity includes an awareness of others and self.

Collaboration: The hallmark of diversity is the ability to work together to create community.

Honesty: Reaching for diversity requires us to own up to our prejudices and stereotypes.

A new video on REACH is in the making. The video, "Native America: Diversity within Diversity," will focus on education the second principle in the REACH. More information regarding this video will be in the next edition of VAuing Diversity.

REACH for Diversity Toolkit

To assist the Veterans Health Administration in meeting organizational cultural health and diversity performance measures, the Diversity Advisory Board has created a REACH for Diversity Toolkit on its Intranet Web site <http://vaww1.va.gov/diversity/>. The purpose of the REACH for Diversity Toolkit is to support medical centers, VISNs, and program office staff with comprehensive and useful information regarding diversity, diversity management, and cultural competency

resources. In the REACH for Diversity Toolkit, you will find suggested readings and videos on diversity related topics. You will also have access to many Web site links that offer a gateway into a plethora of excellent diversity resources to support diversity activities and initiatives at your facility. The REACH for Diversity Toolkit is as good as its content. If you know of any good diversity resources (e.g., books, videos, slide presentations, best practices, or Web site links), please forward them to David Rabb, executive assistant to the Diversity Advisory Board, at david.rabb@va.gov.

General Accountability Office Report on Diversity Management

In January of 2005, the General Accountability Office (GAO) released a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate on diversity best practices in the federal government. Specifically, GAO's objectives were to identify leading diversity management practices and examples of identified practices in the federal government. To ascertain this information GAO interviewed experts in the field of diversity management and reviewed the literature for best practices in diversity management. In addition, GAO selected 10 agencies with the highest summary ranking from a 1999 government-wide survey of federal agencies' diversity management programs to review identified diversity practices that were in place.

For purpose of review, GAO defined diversity management “as a process to create and maintain a positive work environment where the similarities and differences of individuals are valued, so that all can reach their potential and maximize the contributions to an organization's strategic goals and objectives.”

Upon its review of the literature, GAO found the following nine practices as contributing to high performance organizations and link with leading diversity management practices:

- Top leadership commitment
- Diversity as part of an organization's strategic plan
- Diversity linked to performance.
- Measurement
- Accountability
- Succession planning
- Recruitment
- Employee involvement
- Diversity training

Although GAO did not evaluate the effectiveness of the cited practices in its report, diversity experts and the literature agreed that a combination of the above identified practices are consistent with human capital management and should be considered when an organization is developing and implementing diversity management initiatives. The best diversity practices shared in the report are not exhaustive, but it does provide a frame of reference to draw conclusions and brainstorm ways to improve and maintain a positive work environment that values diversity and ensure equity in opportunities for all.

The GAO report also referenced the VHA and efforts being taken to move the Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Advisory Board “to the next level.” For more information on the GAO report: <http://www.va.gov/diversity> (Intranet).

Diversity Questions and Answers

Question: When I look at people from other races, I don't see their color first, I see them as people. Isn't this way of being “color blind” what moving beyond racism is about?

Answer: To be seen and understood without conditions is one of the highest honors we can pay each other – to give our full attention to who we are as individuals rather than as members of a racial group. Racism is to see the person of another race as inferior to one's own race. Acknowledging that we come from different background, is not, in itself racist.

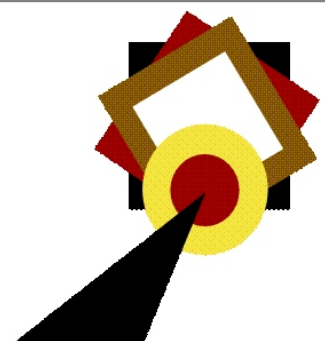
Furthermore, many people today are proud of their heritage, race and ethnicity. To ignore another person's race and to strive for “color blindness” may be regarded as offensive in itself, as it ignores an aspect of people that they may see as an asset and a source of pride.

Please send your diversity question to ruth.holmes@va.gov or david.rabb@va.gov

VALuing Diversity Newsletter Team

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Please submit any suggestions, articles, other input for future VALuing Diversity issues and/or any innovations or best-practices at your facility to ruth.holmes@va.gov.



Our Strength is Our Diversity!